

A Moment to Ourselves

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A Moment to Ourselves

**A/N: Again, a story about which I am not completely sure about. I had this picture, this starting situation in my head, and that part even turned out well, but thenâ€¦ nothing. Scratches. Writing the first part of this went so easily, but then the endingâ€¦ not so much. But I still hope that you'll enjoy it :)

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><p>When his personal secretary announced that Chu Zi, the head of the kitchens, was there and wanted to speak with him, Zuko already knew something was wrong. The only problem is that Zuko was well aware of the fact that this 'something wrong' could have been anything from the kitchen running out of lychee nuts to somebody caught in the middle of trying to poison his food.<p>

Zuko let out a deep sigh, pinched the bridge of his nose â€" he was in the middle of drafting a very delicate trade agreement with Omashu and the last thing he needed was the bothersome chef â€", but he told the secretary to let the man in nonetheless. After all, it might have been something important.

â€|Though he saw a very slim chance for that.

The cook was a nervous and often worried little man with a ridiculously big potbelly and long, black, Earth Kingdom-style braid. He had only started working in the palace after Zuko's banishment under Ozai's rule, but when it turned out that he didn't really have

a preference for Fire Lord" he was loyal to the one who paid him and who appreciated his food" Zuko let him stay when he got rid of the servants who were his father's followers. (And in his decision it was also a factor that Chu Zi really was excellent at his job.)

But right then the cook looked like he couldn't even make rice. His hands were shaking, he was sweating and he looked overall, well" guilty.

"It's about the Lady, my Lord," he started after bowing low, immediately catching Zuko's attention. He sat up straighter in his seat, worry already awakening in him. Was something wrong? Was Katara alright? But before his panic could have taken the best of him, Chu Zi continued: "She has taken over the kitchens."

Zuko almost laughed out loud in relief. It was so, so" Katara. Of course, this didn't justify her actions; it didn't mean that she wasn't supposed to doing it or that he was happy about it.

"What?" He managed to ask without embarrassing himself, requiring more information.

Chu Zi took a daring step towards him, still a little bent at the waist.

"She came to the kitchens maybe half an hour ago, and told everybody that they could go home. Most of us wanted to stay and help, but she insisted we left. She said she wanted to have the kitchen for herself."

Zuko, again, pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Did she say anything else?"

"No, my Lord."

"And where is she now?"

"In the kitchen, my Lord. At least I think so" she didn't look like she wanted to leave when I came to you. She was just putting out some equipment and ingredients." Chu Zi explained. Zuko nodded, scowling a little. He didn't really like this"!

"Thank you, Chu Zi," he said, rising from his seat behind the desk. "You may go now. Enjoy your day off my wife has granted you. I'll take it from here." While speaking, he put the unfinished draft into one of his drawers; it could wait" Katara was more important. And he wasn't making any headway anyway.

"But my Lord, shouldn't I"?" Chu Zi started, but Zuko shook his head.

"Just go on!" He allowed himself a small smile. "I'll deal with her."

The kitchens were literally on the other side of the palace, but he still got there relatively fast. And upon entering, true to Chu Zi's words, he found the rather nice-sized room, where quite often feasts for hundreds were prepared, completely empty, save for his lovely wife, who was standing by a stove with her back to him.

He sneaked behind her and embraced her from behind.

"Shouldn't you be in bed?" He asked in lieu of greeting with a slight scowl. She jumped a little in surprise.

"The physician said that I should take things easy and avoid stress, not that I am on bed rest," She answered without missing a beat, even if a little bit annoyed. "And believe me or not, but that's exactly what I am doing right now."

"By what, if I may ask?"

"By avoiding your courtiers. They make my blood pressure spike." He chuckled. Even though he couldn't see her face, he knew she was pouting. And anyway, the courtiers annoyed him quite often, too. "And by doing something sensible, so I don't go mad."

"But you two are okay, right?" He asked, sliding his hand down a little bit, so it was resting on her rounded stomach; he could feel his child move under his palm. She turned in his arms, spatula still in hand.

"Oh, we are splendid, other than the fact that your child wouldn't let me take a nap." She stabbed his chest with the spatula, as if it was his fault. "And that he's adamant about having Water Tribe food," She continued, turning back to the stove. Zuko stepped to the side and leaned against the counter.

"So that's why you took over the kitchen."

She shrugged.

"It's not my fault that none of your cooks know anything about Water Tribe cuisine. And don't try to contradict me â€“ I've tested them."

"But even then, you know that you could have easily sent somebody for the chef of the Water Tribe restaurant in the city, right? He could've done the job."

Her hand stilled mid-stir; she looked sideways at him, her eyes narrowed.

"Instead of telling me off, why don't you help me a little?" Her tone indicated that helping her wasn't an option, but a mandatory task. She nodded towards a bowl of vegetables on the counter within Zuko's reach. "Cut those up, will you?"

Zuko only nodded and, grabbing a knife from the holder, got down to work.

"Anyway, I wasn't telling you off. I am simply concerned." He muttered, eliciting a sigh from Katara.

"I told you I was fine," she said, placing her free hand on her stomach. "There're still six weeks until my due date and it doesn't seem like this baby wants to come out before that. Everything is perfectly fine."

He turned his head towards her swiftly, his hands still working on the vegetables.

"And then what was that little episode last week?" He asked, remembering the panic he felt when one evening, after a rather stressful day, Katara first complained about discomfort, then grimaced in pain as a contraction seized her. Then and there, for a moment he really thought that he was going to lose them, or at least the baby. Lost in thought he wasn't really paying attention to what he was doing, and the knife he was holding bit deep into his finger. "Ouch! Damn it!" He cried out, dropping the knife.

Katara only shook her head.

"Things like that, false labors, happen from time to time," she said while stepping closer and taking his injured hand into hers without a word. "Okay, I admit, I should have taken things a little bit easier. But I still think that you overreacted the whole ordeal." While speaking she summoned some water from the sink and, coating her hand with it, she wordlessly healed the cut on his finger. "Yes, I had a contraction or two, but that's it; there was no need to rally up half of the city's healers and physicians. I had the whole situation under control."

Zuko scowled.

"Well, excuse me for being worried when the lives of my wife and child are at risk."

Even though she had finished healing his hand she didn't turn back to the pot, but took his face into her hands and looked into his eyes.

"You see? You are overreacting again." She pressed a quick kiss to his lips. "We are fine; we are going to be fine. Everything is going as it should." Then with this she turned her attention back to whatever she was cooking.

Zuko blinked, looking at her, then shook his head and took the knife into hand one more time.

"But I'd still feel better if you rested more. Just to be sure, you know," he shrugged as if he really didn't find it that important.

Katara let out a little half-groan, half-sigh.

"I have already stopped going to the council sessions and I put holding audiences on hold until the baby's born, as well as charity cases, which means that now I have way more free time than I am used to. Do you want to know what I have done today so far? I read; played mahjong with your mother â€“ before she had to hurry off to do my job, if I might add â€“; tried to rearrange some stuff in the nursery until a servant came in and stopped me, saying that it was below me; read some more; tried to take a nap, but as I've already said, your child wouldn't let me â€“ as soon as I lay down he started kicking like it was his job." She turned to him, a funny, sort-of-angry, sort-of-amused expression on her face. "Have you ever tried falling asleep while somebody was dancing in your stomach? It's impossible," she huffed, wiping a few loose strands of hair from her face. "So I

wouldn't say I did anything productive today and I can laze only so much one day." She raised the spatula from the pot and, raising it to her lips, she tasted it. She let out a content moan in approval. "Are those vegetables done yet?"

Sweeping the last of the tomato-carrots into the bowl, he handed the cut vegetables to Katara. He watched as she put the vegetables into the pot. Even though he was no expert in Water Tribe meals, he was pretty sure that none of them required tomato-carrots, as they were only native in the Fire Nation and in warmer parts of the Earth Kingdom, but he was smart enough not to mention it to Katara.

So he just watched her as she made the finishing touches on the food, stirring it "once with the spatula, once with her bending", adding spices, smelling and tasting it. Despite it being such an everyday thing, Zuko found her movements enchanting, awe-inspiring. She was his queen, his goddess, and frankly, no matter what she did, she amazed him.

A few minutes later she deemed the food ready, lifting the pot from the fire, putting it aside to let it cool, and already reaching for a cabinet where she guessed utensils were kept.

"Hey, hey, let me do that, okay?" Zuko stopped her, pulling her backwards softly. He didn't like the idea of her straining herself to get the stuff from the higher shelves, let alone to stand on top of something to reach them. "Just sit down; I'll set the table."

She sighed, but didn't protest.

"Alright," she said, pressing one hand against the small of her back as she walked over to an empty, plain, medium-sized table only a few steps from the counter. She sat down with a soft moan.

"Does it hurt?" Zuko asked immediately while rummaging the cabinet searching for bowls and chopsticks. He found them easily "they weren't the fancy, richly decorated ones they usually ate from, but he guessed they would do now.

"A little. Especially when I am on my feet for a long time," she admitted, massaging her back, at least what she could reach herself. "One of the downsides of being pregnant, I guess," she shrugged, a soft smile on her lips. This was another thing that puzzled and mesmerized him about pregnant women "or about only Katara, he couldn't decide": no matter how uncomfortable or even painful their situation seemed, they still bore it with a smile, like it was nothing.

Maybe, compared to what they were bearing it for, it was nothing.

"Do you want me to give you a massage later?" He asked as he walked over to the table, utensils in hand.

"Yes, please," she basically purred, her annoyance completely gone. "And maybe you could knead my ankles a little, too?"

"Anything for you," he said, reflecting her smile back at her. After setting everything in place he turned back to the counter one more time and brought the still hot food to the table. Sitting down he

first served her, then put some of it into his bowl as well. No matter what it was, it did smell good.

They started eating wordlessly, only Katara giving out soft, approving sounds as she devoured her own creation; Zuko just watched her, a small, amused smile on his face. It was not a strained silence, but a comfortable one. It was a rare occurrence, anyway, just the two of them having dinner together, something they made without help, without servants or guards or guests around, just the two of them in the dimly lit kitchen, without anybody to watch them, to judge them, in complete peace.

Zuko there and then decided that they should do it more often.

It was Katara, halfway through the meal, who spoke first.

"Do you know what's the only thing that really bugs me about this whole taking things easy-ordeal?" She asked and then answered her question right away before he could have uttered a word. "That I miss you."

Zuko's eyes widened a little in surprise.

"How so? I am right here with you."

Katara whimpered a little as she picked at her food.

"Yes, right now. But since I put most of my Fire Lady duties on hiatus, there are days when I only see you in the morning and before bedtime. Before that at least I could accompany you to your meetings and councils sessions, and I understand that you are busy and that it's your duty, but stillâ€|" she looked up at him, her eyes wide, "â€|I miss you."

Zuko looked down at the table, feeling a little guilty. Yes, dealing with the Fire Nation had eaten up most of his time recently; deciding on next year's budget had taken longer than usual and he had also wanted to be ahead of himself with some projects, so when the baby came he could spend more time with his family.

The only thing he hadn't realized until now was that this way he was neglecting his wife now.

"Katara, Iâ€|" he started, putting his chopsticks down. "I am sorry, I should haveâ€|"

"Don't apologize; I understand. I knew what I was getting myself into when I married you," she said, her eyes filling with tears. "Now, look at me! I am crying," she let out a teary chuckle as she wiped her eyes with her sleeve. "This pregnancy is making me crazy."

There was a very strong urge in Zuko to go to her and sweep her into his arms, press her against his chest and never let her go, but somehow he managed to suppress it and, reaching over the table, he only took her hand.

"Don't cry, okay?" he caressed her soft skin with his thumb. "We'll figure something out, I promise. We'll find some middle ground."

Katara only nodded, most of her tears already dried up.

"I'm sure of it," she smiled. "And I am sorry, too. For being this unmanageable and all." She sighed, resting her hand on her stomach. "Sometimes I just wish it was already over and I was completely myself again."

One of the corners of Zuko's mouth pulled upwards.

"Oh, don't worry. You are not that unmanageable at all; you've been worse."

Katara's eyes narrowed, but when she spoke her voice was teasing, not angry.

"Be careful what you say! You really don't want to get on my bad side now," she said, laughter hiding in her voice.

Zuko chuckled.

"Will do." Seeing that she'd finished eating, he collected both of their bowls and chopsticks and, walking over to the counter, he placed them into the sink. His enthusiasm about dining on their own didn't go that far that he even attempted to wash them. Then, on a sudden thought, he added: "Until now, would you like to help me?"

"Sure, with what?" She asked, already eager that she had something to do. Something that actually needed to be done.

"There's this trade agreement I've been working on, but I am getting nowhere with it." He explained as he helped her stand. Even though she never said it, with the centre of her gravity changing, she had been having difficulties with simple things like standing up. "Would you read it through and help me finish it if I brought it to bed? You could read it while I give you a massage."

Katara pretended to consider his request tapping her forefinger against her lips, while, with her other hand, she took his.

"Yeah, sure, why not? Bring it on!" She said with mocked nonchalance, almost teasingly.

He bent down and pressed a kiss against the top of her head.

"And I guess, if it's done, there's nothing else on my schedule I couldn't postpone," he mused. "I could take a little break; spend more time with you, making up the last few weeks."

She nodded.

"I'd like that. Maybe we could go to Ember Island for a few days? That's not a very long journey," she proposed as they slowly walked out of the kitchen.

Zuko considered her words for a few moments. It wasn't a terrible idea, not at all. The island was only a few hours away and they could take a comfortable little boat, so the journey wouldn't even be that exhausting, not even in her condition. Her due date wasn't that close, either, that they couldn't risk spending a few days away from

the Capitol. And she would only benefit from the peaceful privacy of the beach house; it would be the perfect place for her and for him, too, he added reluctantly to wind down and relax a little.

But speaking of relaxationâ€|

"I'm all for it, but didn't you just say that you don't like lazing around whole day? Now, you wouldn't do many 'productive' things on Ember Island. Doesn't it bother you?" He teased lightly, going even as far as tickling her side. She chuckled, squirming away.

"Oh, having you all by myself and keeping you in line for a few days will give me enough work for not be bored, believe me," she giggled.

Zuko didn't argue with her.

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><p>AN: I find it confusing, and sometimes even a little disturbing, when in some fandom not only in AtLA, but, for example, in How to Train Your Dragon as well a pregnant character is acting 'weird' and she and the other characters blame her hormones for it. I mean they are not that advanced in technology and science in either fandom to know what hormones are, let alone about what they have to do pregnancy. In AtLA, for instance, I think it would be more appropriate to blame, let's say, the changing chi paths in the body :P**

End
file.